



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

City of San Diego  
Planning & Development Review  
**Building Development Review**  
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# Building Newsletter 31-1

## Patio Covers

Interpretations of State and Local Building Codes  
1998 California Building Code: Chapter 31  
Revision Date: July 1999

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### I. Patio Cover Limitations and Requirements

- A. Patio covers, as permitted by Chapter 31, Division III of the Appendix to the current edition of the Building Code, have certain limitations.
  1. They are not designed or intended to be used as room additions which require compliance with Code provisions such as waterproofing, heating, and normal live and wind loads. Since patio covers are not necessarily waterproof, this Department should be consulted regarding any improvements, particularly those pertaining to electrical work.
  2. Patio covers, generally, cannot always be converted to complying room additions. This Department should be contacted prior to the anticipated conversion to review the proposed work.
  3. The concrete slab of the patio cover cannot cover the existing exterior wall's weep screed.
- B. Sections 3116 and 3118 of the Appendix to the CBC specify that patio covers are roofed structures and must meet certain requirements. Patio covers:
  1. Are one story structures.
  2. May not exceed twelve feet in height.
  3. Require a minimum distance of six feet eight inches from floor to soffit of supporting member.
  4. Shall not be located on an exterior wall such that

it covers an existing bedroom emergency escape window (Section 310.4).

5. Are required to have an open area not to be covered with any material except:
  - a. Insect screening with mesh not finer than one-sixteenth inch by one-sixteenth inch, or
  - b. Readily removable translucent or transparent flexible plastic not more than one-eighth inch in thickness.
6. May be detached or attached to other buildings as accessories to Group U, Group R, Division 3 or single units in Group R, Division 1 Occupancies.
7. May be used only for recreational or outdoor living purposes, not as habitable rooms, carports, garages, or storage rooms.
8. Must meet structural requirements as specified in Sections 3117 and 3119.
9. Must meet the requirements of Table No. 5-A for wall and opening protection based on location on property for a Group R, Division 3 Occupancy.
10. May have enclosure walls of any configuration, provided the open area of the longer wall and one additional wall is equal to at least 65 percent of the area below a minimum of six feet eight inches of each wall, measured from the floor.

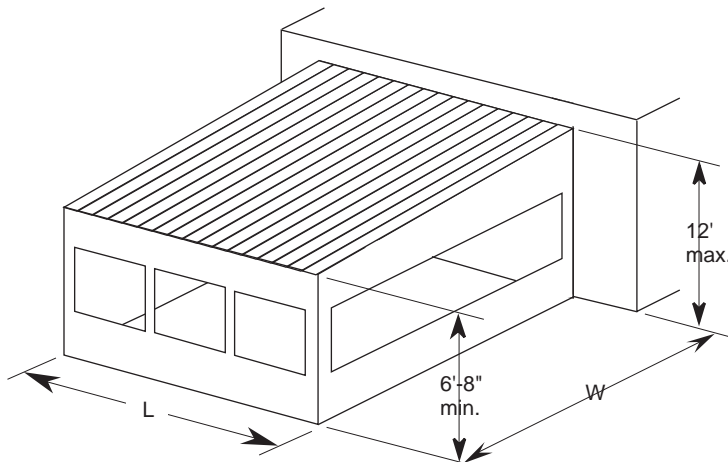
### II. Examples

The following examples are intended to show how Chapter 31 of the Appendix to the current CBC applies to typical patio cover layouts.

- A. A patio cover with three sides open must have open area provided on the longer side and one other side for a total of not less than 65 percent of the area of its longer side plus one additional side as shown in Figure 1. The height of wall to be used in calculations shall be six feet eight inches. The remaining area may be of solid material and/or sliding glass doors. See Section II, Item F for computation of required open area.

For all these examples, generally, only insect screening or removable plastic screening is permitted in required open area; sliding glass doors are not permitted in required open areas.

**Figure 1/Patio cover with three sides open**



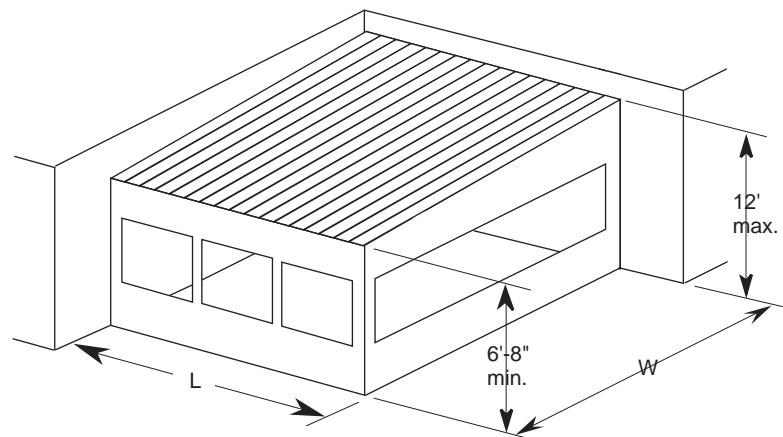
B. A patio cover with two adjacent sides open must have open area provided on the longer side and, if necessary, the shorter side for a total of not less than 65 percent of the area of the longer side plus the shorter side as shown in Figure 2. The height of wall to be used in calculations shall be six feet eight inches. The remaining area may be of solid material and/or sliding glass doors. See Section II, Item F for computation of required open area.

C. A patio cover with two opposite sides open must have open area provided on either or both of the open sides for a total of not less than 65 percent of the area of side "L" plus side "W" as shown in Figure 3. The height of wall to be used in calculations shall be six feet eight inches. The remaining area may be of solid material and/or sliding glass doors. See Section II, Item F for computation of required open area.

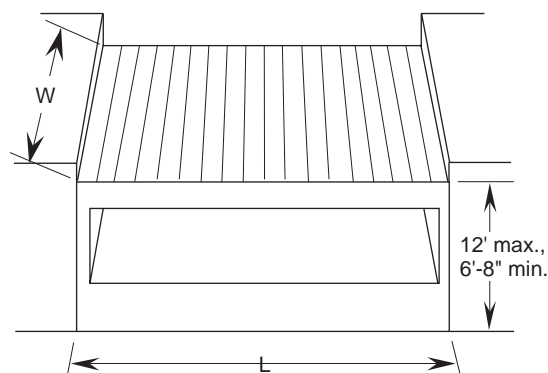
D. A patio cover with one side open must have open area provided on side "L" equal to at least 65 percent of the area of side "L" plus side "W" as shown in Figure 4. The height of wall to be used in calculations shall be six feet eight inches. The remaining area may be solid material and/or sliding glass doors. See Section II, Item F for computation of required open area.

E. A patio cover with one side and a portion of a second side open must have open area provided on side "L" and side "R" equal to at least 65 percent of the area of side "W" plus side "L" as shown in Figure 5. The height of wall to be used in calculations shall be six feet eight inches. The remaining area may be of solid material and/or sliding glass doors. See Section II, Item F for computation of required open area.

**Figure 2/Patio cover with two adjacent sides open**



**Figure 3/Patio cover with two opposite sides open**



**Figure 4/Patio cover with one side open**

